

The Return

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Summary: Lately, Finn's had the same recurring dream. Stormtrooper after Stormtrooper, killed by his hand. He's learned that the only way to stop those nightmares...is to stop sleeping. But solutions never come so easily. Now, Finn must learn the meaning of broken promises, how to repair them...and how to move on when there is nothing that can be done.

The Return

Finn hadn't been sleeping. When he was with the First Order, he knew that sleep was as precious as stardust. After all the drills, he and the rest of his squad dragged themselves into their bunks, their bodies too weak to hold a blaster. And they'd restâ€|only to have Captain Phasma invade their dreams, and steal their rest away. Sleep was a precious thing.

And now that Finn was free, he found that blessed rest was even harder to come by. What was once a scramble to recover as much energy as possible, was now a stark reminder of everything he had gained and lost. His helmet traded for a pilot's jacket. His designation traded for a name, cobbled together with a hasty mouth. His history wiped away for a future that even he did not fully understand. It was in Finn's dreams that he saw Slip's face, as pale as moon beams. He could feel the pulse of Nines' blood, hot and boiled, as angry as a brother who had been betrayed. In his dreams, Finn could see the cold expression in Zeroes' eyes, round stones that shined against his dark skin. Sometimes, he even joked that he and Finn could be brothers.

"We are brothers," Finnâ€|no, back then he went by a different titleâ€|said.

Now, sleep was just a reminder of the men he had betrayed, and the blood he spilled. He didn't have a choice, of course, it was kill or be killed. He needed to escapeâ€|but saying that every night didn't

make the guilt go away. Perhaps, nothing ever would.

* * *

><p>"I've gotta say buddyâ€|you look awful." Poe Dameron was never one to hold his tongue. The Resistance's greatest pilot was quick with his wit, but often times, never thought about how his words (or actions) would affect those too close to him. Case in point, Finn, who had just spent the previous night going over the Resistance's battle plans, and finding the best counterpoints to attack the First Order with.<p>

Finn yawned, and stirred his porridge. A goopy breakfast that Poe had insisted he try after he was released from the hospital. Poe had sworn it would stick to Finn's ribs (though, Finn was still confused as to why that was a good thing). The Resistance mess hall was like a completely different galaxy to Finn. Where the First Order's walls were slathered in gray and white, the Resistance's halls were decorated with murals and testaments to great heroism. Paintings of air strikes, and soldiers decorated the walls. Shades of greens, and hues of redsâ€|colors Finn didn't even know existed.

And he would have been amazed, if all of those colors weren't hurting his eyes so damn much.

"Finn?" Poe gently tapped Finn's shoulder. "You still with me, buddy?"

Finn loosened his grip on his spoon, and watched as his porridge settled into his bowl. It swirled, and bubbled, just like the sand that swallowed the TIE that he and Poe had escaped with. A dusty grave that would never be satisfied, no matter how much it consumed.

"Yeah Poe," Finn said, "I'm alrightâ€|I've just got a lot on my mind."

Poe smirked, "Rey, right?" Poe looked down to his plate, a small loaf of bread sitting in honey, soaking up whatever sweetness it could. "Look, there's no reason to torture yourself over her. From what you've told me, she's pretty capable of taking care of herself."

Finn knew that better than anyone. But it didn't stop him from worrying about her, just as his conscious did not stop him thinking about his old squadron.

"Look," Poe shoved a small piece of bread into his mouth, "You can'tâ€|" he chewed, "â€|torture yourself over it." And swallowed. "Rey'll be back as soon as she can, and I'm pretty sure she wouldn't want to see you lookin' like you'd just wrestled a Bantha. Right?"

Finn shoved his spoonful of porridge into his mouth. He couldn't really think of a response that would satisfy Poe. He wasn't one to divulge his own problems to others, the First Order frowned on that, and Poe was busy leading the Black Squadron in aerial assaults, he didn't need any extra distractions. And what exactly could Finn even say? He felt guilty for the Stormtroopers he had abandoned. He felt like a murderer for the Troopers he killed, poisoned through their

helmets with gas Finn released into the air. As a cadet, Finn loved to see the diversity of his squadronâ€¦but when he closed his eyes, all he could picture was the look of sheer horror as poison filled their lungs. Faces scrunched in fear, hands grasping for fresh breath as if it were only just out of reach.

"I'll try get to sleep earlier."

Poe nodded, "Yeahâ€¦you do that."

* * *

><p>It was the end of the cycle, and the rest of the base was turning inâ€¦and Finn still stood in front of Resistance monitors, checking pulse engines, checking weaponry, searching the skies for any sign of hostility. But mostly, avoiding his own dreams. In the gentle light of the control room.<p>

"What happened to 'I'll try to sleep earlier'?"

Finn scrubbed his eyes free of whatever fatigue was building up in them. He knew that if Poe Dameron saw him, there would be no room for argument. Poe was stubborn that way.

"I just wanted to check on a few things make sure everything's in working order before turning in," Finn said.

Poe folded his arms, the same way Finn imagined a concerned brother would. Not that Finn had known the scorn of a concerned family member, not really. "And, what's your explanation for over working yourself last week? And pointing out flaws in the First Order's battle plans-"

"That was just battle strategy-"

"For six hours straightâ€¦well past lights out? You think the others haven't noticed? Hell, I've got doctors on my ass tellin' me you're not resting enough."

"Poe, I-"

"And they're right. You're not resting enough." Poe's arms fell down to his sides, his sleeves scraped against his orange flight suit. It was strange, the sight of a uniform always made Finn proud. He used to feel like he could conquer anything when he wore his Trooper helmet, but now, the idea of stark uniformity made him feel like a prisoner. It was always a joy to see the small touches the Resistance added to their attire. Little rings around fingers to remind them of loved ones. Popped collars and smudged boots to deflate the monotony of war.

"This isn't the First Order, buddy." Poe said as he approached, arms out and open. "No one's gonna blame you if you catch a little sleep. I promise."

"Poe, I know that. I just want to make sure I'm doing all that I can."

I can't sleepâ€¦

With a gentle hand, Poe seized the collar of Finn's shirt, "You're comin' with me, buddy."

* * *

><p>Since Finn had been released from the hospital, he had been assigned a small living space. With a cot, a window, and a drawer to place his belongings. Poe had always done everything he could to ensure Finn's comfort, he even tried his best to get Finn to bunk with him. Who better than to get him acclimated to non-First Order life, right?<p>

But Finn had declined. It wasn't because he wanted to avoid Poe—it was just that he didn't want to keep his new friend up all night. Since leaving the First Order, Finn had never known a restful night. His dreams would not allow it. He'd close his eyes, and there was Slip's blood. He drift off to sleep, and there was Nines' voice. He'd lay down on his cot—and all he could feel was the cold steel of his abandoned rifle.

"Now, you're taking the bed," Poe said as he pointed. Poe's room was certainly something. Where Finn's quarters were small and cramped, Poe's had a little more breathing room. And dear Force, did the guy have knickknacks, there were small wooden statues of the Huts, and little rocket ships that sat upon his dresser gathering dust. There were holophotos of pilots, Jess and Snap, and others whom Finn had yet to meet. "And you're not gonna leave it until morning—even if I gotta tie you down myself."

With a curt push against his chest, Finn found himself sitting on Poe's bed.

"Take your shoes off, get comfy. You and I are gonna have a regular sleepover."

Poe walked over to his dresser and rummaged through the drawers, and pulled out a blanket and small pillow. "The guys in my squadron always loved these sleepovers. It was a pretty nice team bonding exercise. Made us feel like family."

Family. There was that word again.

Poe settled down next to the bed, and wrapped himself up in a warm cloth. "You better not snore, Finn."

Finn sunk deep into his blankets, and let his rest against his chest. Just one night off. Just one night without the dreams. The guilt. The taste of blood on his tongue, hot like copper.

Just one night of rest—that's all he wanted.

* * *

><p>A room of white and gray. Uniformity to its highest caliber. Gone were the red paints, and orange zeal of Resistance murals, and lively chatter. In their places stood a deep, caged longing, and a silence that felt like a suffocating scream.<p>

"Eight-Seven? Can you hear me?"

And through that silence, came a voice, familiar and gentle.

"Slip?" Finn asked. He looked around, and saw nothing but white. White walls. White doors that could never be opened. White floors that looked like no one had ever set foot on them. Sterile and unfeeling. "Slip?" Finn called out again, "Can you hear me?"

It flickered. Sterile and whiteâ€|to all consuming darknessâ€|and back again.

"Slip?" Finn called.

"Eight-Sevenâ€|aren't you a sight for sore eyes." Slip. In all of his pale faced, and hazel eyed glory. Slip, the Stormtrooper Finn watched out for, who held in high regard, who claimed as one of his own. Slipâ€|he was alive.

And Finn ran, and wrapped his arms around his lost comrade. "I can't believe thisâ€|"

"Don't leave me behind." Slip said, "Don't leave meâ€|"

Finn squeezed his arms around Slip's neck, sunk his chin into his friend's shoulders, listened to the steady breathing of the man in front of himâ€|and the smelled blood.

"Slip?" And on his lips, Finn felt the cold sting of copper, and the stark taste of blood. His sleeves stained red. "S-slip?" And slowly, as Finn pulled away, Slip's face melted from the pale innocence Finn had recognized, to a slow, carnivorous red.

"â€|don't leave me behind."

And even nowâ€|in Finn's armsâ€|the world was still bleeding.

* * *

><p>Finn awoke in a crazed sweat, gasping for breath in the shroud of night. He felt like he had been holding his breath for days. He wiped his hands over his face, convinced there were still specks of blood adhering to his palms. Slick and smooth, the last remnants of an old life. He could hear Poe's steady breathing, chest rising and falling in a peaceful song.<p>

"Get it together Finn," he whispered. It was lucky Poe was such a heavy sleeper, Finn didn't want to have to explain his sudden jolt to consciousness, he could barely understand it himself. "Fresh air," Finn said, "â€|I just need some air."

Finn stood outside the bay hangar, where the X-wings refueled. D'Qar was nothing like the Starkiller Base. Frozen tundra traded for warm skies. Of all the things Finn did not miss, the cold weather was high on the list. This planet was beautiful at night. The stars looked like a million diamonds shimmering against a dark canvas. The night air wrapped itself around Finn's arms, and chest, a makeshift hug from his new home. It was comforting to a man who had known so little. His dreams were only getting worse. They were strange, disturbing even, but never this bad. Never this graphic. A world of white that he had painted red with his own hands.

"Still can't sleep I take it?" General Leia Organa, shrouded in a blue night robe, walked barefoot across the moist ground.

Finn wished he could have been surprised by the appearance, but his mind was still shaken from his lack of sleep. His body and senses were so dulled he didn't even have the energy to turn his head, and salute like any respectful soldier ought to. "Hello General." He tried to raise his hand in a show of respect, but General Leia simply shook her head.

"At ease, there's no need for that." Leia tightened her robe around her waist. "Commander Poe's been worried about you. Not to mention the medical droids, nurses, and plenty of Resistance pilots." She stood beside Finn with her hand clasped, one over the other. "Looks like you've got yourself quite a little fan club."

"I wouldn't say that--"

"I would." General Leia placed a gentle hand on Finn's shoulder, "You know I've got cadets chomping at the bit to get a shooting clinical with you? We've never had anyone with such accurate shooting before." Leia laughed, "And from a Stormtrooper no less! Back in my day Troopers couldn't hit the broadside of a TIE fighter."

For all his life, the greatest compliment he ever received was "Adequate" from a stoic, and unimpressed Captain Phasma. Finn felt his face turn hot at General Leia's words. Was he blushing?

"General," Finn began. "I just wantedâ€¦" he trailed off. What was he supposed to say? He couldn't just spill his guts to his superior. It wasn't proper, and she had enough to worry about leading the entire Resistance against whatever scheme the First Order was trying to inflict on the galaxy.

"You don't need to explain, Finn." Leia looked up to the sky. "You know, Darth Vader destroyed my home planet, Alderaan." Leia combed her fingers through her hair, her tips tasting her scalp. "I was devastated, but I held it in. We had a mission to complete, and a galaxy to save, right? So, I kept holding it inâ€¦for years and years." The stars overhead glimmered and sparkled. There must have been a thousand planets out there, millions of life forms, and daydreamers. Just waiting for the sun to rise and have another chance at life. "My brother always told me that we cannot accept the new life we have, until we learn to let go of the old life we once knew."

That sounded like a Jedi saying.

"I know what you're thinking, it sounds like a bunch of Jedi shitâ€¦and you're right." Leia smiled, "Well, about the shit part, turns out, it was never a Jedi saying. But, either way there was truth to it."

General Leia patted Finn's shoulder, "Don't stay up too late, alright? Those cadets would kill me if anything happened to you." And with a tight turn, a flurry of robe wool, she left Finn in the darkness, with only the stars to hear his secrets.

* * *

><p>"I thought I told you not to leave the bed?" Poe said over breakfast the next morning. The mess hall was back to its rowdy world of gossip and tall tales. If Finn listened closely, he could overhear one of the cadets bragging about his 100% accuracy record.<p>

"Sorry Poe," Finn said, "I just needed a little fresh air."

"No," Poe countered, "What you needed was sleep, and it's quite clear you didn't get any of it. What the Kriff is going on with you, buddy? Even BB-8's been worried."

Finn stared down at his porridge. Lately, he had been getting the same breakfast. Poe had just thought his new friend really liked porridge, but honestly, Finn needed some kind of stability in his life. Everything around him was fluxed and shaky. His life, his resolve, his dreamsâ€|nothing was ever certain for him. Right now, it felt like the only thing he could control was what he shoved in his mouth for breakfast, and even that wasn't enough to give him any comfort.

"Soâ€|" Poe said, "I took a look at the scheduling for this week, apparently you've volunteered for another mission outside the quadrant. Lead by Colonel Reeves?"

"Yeah," Finn said.

"Yeahâ€|" Poe trailed off, and looked to the side, "I went ahead and cancelled it. Told them you weren't in any shape for any kind of mission."

"W-what?"

"Look," Poe Dameron's countenance turned from eased, to a strict solemn that Finn had only ever seen on the face of Captain Phasma. "You've been working yourself nonstop since you were released from the hospital. You haven't been getting your rest, and it's plain to see that your body's deteriorating. You're in no condition to do _anything_ except rest."

"Poe-"

"And General Leia agrees with me. So, you can protest all you want to, buddy. You're grounded until further notice. That means no missions, no research duty, no cleaning, no blaster practiceâ€|nothing."

* * *

><p>With General Leia's orders, the only place Finn was allowed to venture to on base was his own quarters. He had tried to go over the strategies for the new flight missions, but his passcodes had been banned. He had tried to log in some blaster practiceâ€|but he was banned from the weaponry until further notice.<p>

So, with everything on base shut off from him, Finn instead, ventured out into town. A few miles from the Resistance base, sat an old sales town that specialized in parts, and supplies. Often times he would accompany Poe for a beer, or to pick up some parts the X-wing needed. They called the place Junk Townâ€|though, Finn was never sure why. It

wasn't like on Jakku where everything was burnt, or stolen, or broken. The items they sold (or traded, depending on who you talked with) were in great shape.

Junk Town was a small hovel of a community. Stone huts sat in a tight circle on the edge of a small pond. Where Jakku was nothing but dust and sand, Junk Town's lands were green and fertile. Finn wandered through, his hands deep in his own pockets, and his stature slouched. If he were still a Stormtrooper, he would have been issued multiple demerits for such lackluster presentation. A Stormtrooper serves, and is proud to serve. But he was no longer a Stormtrooper. FN-2187, the soldier who would do anything for his men, was dead, and in his place stood Finn, a man who was too confused about his place within the galaxy to actually do anything to help it. And what good was a man like that to anyone?

Finn allowed his eyes to wander up and down the different shops. There were merchants selling cream, and hagglers arguing about the best price. Knickknacks upon knickknacks, small bobbles, and little wooden ships that looked like they'd be right at home on a child's play shelf. And then-

"Whatâ€¦is this?" Finn stopped and stared at the small, inanimate toy that sat, lopsided and torn in front of him. Its stomach was sliced open, and fuzz poured out from inside, almost as if it had been in a battle. Its ear was torn from its side, and a button eye was missing from its face. This was, from what Finn knew, a teddy bear. A toy that helped children fall asleep. Once, when he was still a Stormtrooper cadet, he had seen oneâ€¦almost touched one. It was brought in for target practice, he and his squadron were still young, barely old enough to hold a rifle, let alone aim and shoot with any accuracy. Captain Blanche, the commander for this young battalion had acquired an old toy from one of the neighboring towns the FR Corps had just taken. FN-2187 had only heard of toys and teddy bears before that moment. He wanted to hold it, let his fingers wrap around its body keep it safe. Protect it from the world that wished to do it harmâ€¦but orders were orders.

"Alright men," came the Captain's order, "This toy, is now an enemy of the First Orderâ€¦and what do Troopers do to their enemies?"

FN-2187, and rest of his squadron took arms, aimed and-

"I see you like that bear."

Finn looked to his side, to see an old merchant standing idle by his booth. The hovelled in his stance, and looked like he hadn't stood straight in centuries. His beard was long and white, and fluttered in the soft breeze.

"Yeahâ€¦he just caught my eye," Finn said.

"Well, I never thought I'd see a big strapping guy like you being interested in a child's toy."

Finn just shrugged, "Yeah, well, I'm full of surprises." Finn picked the bear up, "How much?"

"Twenty credits."

That was krifffing outrageous. Twenty creds for a broken toy, that no one in their right mind would take for free? Finn might not have been acclimated to non-First Order life, but that didn't mean he was stupid. He could recognize a scam same as anyone else. It was probably why this bear was still here. Finn looked it over once more, it was in tatters, dirty, with its own stuffing falling out of it every time someone went to touch it. Butâ€|there was something urgent within the thing. A gentle pleading that Finn could not shake.

Don't leave me behindâ€|not again.

"I'll take him."

* * *

><p>Finn sat on his cot, his new friend laying belly up on his pillow. Little soldier was hurting badly. "What happened to you, little guy?" Finn asked.<p>

The door to Finn's quarters opened, and in the door way stood Poe, fresh from a routine aerial drill. "Well, how's the galaxy's bravest Ex-Stormtrooper doing? Get a good nap in?" Poe stopped, and stared down at the stuffed bear on Finn's cot. "What do we have here?"

"Uhâ€|" Finn began, "â€|I found him in Junk Townâ€|h-he was injuredâ€|and I couldn't justâ€|"

Leave him behind, like I did with everyone else.

Poe smiled, a warm friendly, toothy grin that Finn had learned to value. "Good ol' Finn, stickin' his neck out for everyoneâ€|even stuffed animals." Poe sat down on Finn's cot, and took the bear in his fingers. "Good grief, poor guy looks like he just got his ass handed to him by half the galaxy."

Finn shrugged, "Yeah. I guess so." He yawned, he still so tired, but unwilling to sleep.

Poe looked the bear over "Huge hole on his stomach, losing fluids fast, missing an eye and an ear." Poe whistled. "What's his name?" Poe asked.

Finn just shrugged, "Dunno, I hadn't thought of one just yet."

"Ya'know, when I was a kid, I had one of these. Named him Wedge after my favorite pilot. Mom told me these things could keep bad dreams away."

Bad dreams? Finn shook his head, "I'm not even sure I should keep himâ€|he can't be regulation, right?"

Poe placed the bear back down on the cot, "Finn, look," Poe gestured all around Finn's room, "You've been here for a few weeks and your quarters are as barren as a Tatooine dessert." Poe clasped his arm around Finn's shoulder. "You're allowed to have a few personal items, and if this little guy means somethin' to you, then by all means,

keep him."

Through his search, Finn had found a needle and thread, and he had even convinced one of the med droids to hack into the system for him, so he could learn all he could about sewing. He knotted the end of his thread, and gently stitched, a needled his stuffed bear until the large gaping hole was replaced with a deep, thick brown stitching across the toy's stomach. A scar from a lost battle.

"There," Finn said as he held the bear to eyelevel. It wasn't perfect, the thread Finn had chosen did not match the color of the bear's fur, and it was still without an eyeâ€|but at least it's stuffing wouldn't fall out any more.

Don't leave me behind.

No matter what FN-2187 had done in the First Order, his accurate shooting, his crafty strategies, his ability to improvise and adapt, it was never quite enough because he always placed his squadron before the mission. He could count on his fingers and toes the number of times he placed himself, and his mission in jeopardy just to ensure that his entire squadron came back in one piece.

Captain Phasma always scolded him for it. She threatened him, promising him that one more screw up would lead to a demerit. The First Order and its goals were paramount, the soldiers were expendable. But they never were to FN-2187, or to Finn.

We can't embrace our new life, until we let go of our old oneâ€|

It's not that Finn wanted to return to the First Order. Who would want to return to a place where you didn't even have a name? But there were others, just like him, who had never known their names, or families, or potential. All they knew was the First Orderâ€|and Finn left them behind, as easily as Captain Phasma. With all of good hearted nature, all of his empathy, and courage, all of his defiance in the face of cold hearted realismâ€|he had done the one thing he hated the most. Leave a man behind. Was it right to embrace this new life he had, when it also meant leaving his old comrades in the dust? Comrades who, like him, were looked at as nothing more than cannon fodder for a regime that fed itself first, last and always?

Forceâ€|Finn was so tired. What time was it? How long had he been in his quarters? He looked out the window and still saw the sun sinking beneath the horizonâ€|or perhaps it was rising? Was it late evening, or early morning? He couldn't tell the difference anymore.

Was it dinner time? Breakfast time? Finn stood, and leaned against his door. His knees buckled under his own weight. He stumbled into the hallway, his vision blurred and unfocused. Walls he had walked passed thousands of times before, turned unfriendly and foreign. Where was he? What was he doing? Blasters that took the heads off teddy bears, and little boys who were forced to know war too soon. His squad, the FN Corps, as Captain Phasma called them, were ragtag, shoddy, and probably the closest thing any of those boys (and yesâ€|they were just boys) had to a family. FN-2199, with red hair and bold attitude. FN-2000, with a thick scar across his face, his dark skin reflecting any light that shined its way. FN-2003, who

couldn't aim, or fight to save his own skin, and FN-2187â€|the one who would grow up to become a traitor.

Chow time was just that. Chow. Time. No talking. No comradery. No joking like boys their age should be. No time on the holonet. No gossip about which of the other cadets was getting taller, or which of the Captains were riding them too hard. Just chowing on rubber rations that tasted like plaster. There was a begrudging tolerance between the four of them, and to FN-2187, that was the closest thing he had to friendship. Just a shaky promise that no one would be left in the dust. And that was a promise, FN-2187 wanted to keep.

What else was there to keep himself hopeful?

Finn?

What else was there to keep himself grounded?

Buddy, hold onâ€|

Why was the room spinning?

_Finnâ€|can you hear me? _

And everything was soâ€|heavyâ€|and darkâ€|and slow.

"Finn, can you hear me?"

He saw boots, felt the dirt on the hard floors, and had the taste of a dried tongue in his mouth. Gentle hands cupped his chin. Voices swirled in his hear.

"Just hold on."

Before Finn could register what was happening, he felt himself hoisted over someone's shoulders, his arms dangling, and his breath short. "Just hold on buddy."

Don't leave me behindâ€|

"We'll get ya' fixed up."

* * *

><p>It was coming back into focus. The room spun, white walls, bland sheets, and the soft rise and fall of another person's chest. Breathe in. Breathe out.<p>

"W-what?" Finn propped himself up against his elbows, and began to register all that was around him. Medical droids buzzing to and from his bedside. Water swirling in nearby bed pans. And Poe Dameron by his side, arms crossed like a disapproving brother.

"You wanna tell me what's been bothering you these past weeks, because I'm gettin' pretty sick of worrying myself to death."

"Poe-

"And don't even try to give me that 'It's not important' shit. Finn,

I found you passed out in the hallway. Whatever's going on with you, I need to know about it." And Poe leaned back into his chair, his eyes steeled. "Now."

Shit, what time was it? Finn rubbed his temples, and stared out into the med bay window. The sun was high overhead, and the cadets were out running drills. It must have been noon.

"You were following me?" Finn asked.

"I didn't see you at breakfast. I got worried, came lookin' for you. And now it's your turn to give an explanation."

The med bay hadn't changed since Finn had last visited it. Still the same hum of med droids. Still the same smell of linen and tissue papers. It was like being with the First Order all over again. "I-I haven't been sleeping."

"Yeah, and Obi-Wan Kenobi was a Jedi master. The question is _why_?"

Finn twiddled his thumbs, and could not meet Poe's gaze. He felt like he was being interrogated by Phasma, with her cold calculated stare assessing every single weakness Finn ever had. Too much empathy. Too much kindness. Too willing to risk everything for his squadron. Perhaps, in some small way, she was right. He did care too much. He carried his guilt around like his Trooper armor. He practically lived in it.

"I'veâ€|been having these dreams."

"Dreams?" Poe asked. "What kind of dreams?"

"Horrid onesâ€|ones thatâ€|" Finn locked his thumbs together, his hands were already beginning to shake. Come on, keep it together, "â€|that keep me up."

"Every night?" Poe asked, his voice dropping to a shrewd whisper. He did that when he was concerned. "How long has this been happening?"

"Too long," Finn said. "You know, when I was with the First Order, Captain Phasma always told me that my empathy would be my down fall. She said that caring so much about my squadron would place everyone in dangerâ€|I guess she was right." Finn wanted to shut his eyes, to allow his mind to wander, to let his body rest, "â€|but every time I close my eyes, I just see my old corps. The men I left behind after my defection. Slip. Nines. Zeroes. I-I left them behind."

Poe scoffed, "Uhâ€|yeah. I can't help but notice you're ignoring the fact that they tried to kill you. On multiple accounts."

"I know that. I _know_ that." Finn said, his voice was cracked under the strain of his own fatigue. He buried his face into his hands, he could still see them. Slip's pale face. Nines' red hair. Zeroes' facial scar. Every time he closed his eyes. "Butâ€|they're still human beings." Finn's eyes were red and blotched, he wasn't even sure if he was making any sense. "I promised I'd come backâ€|"

Slip. Zeroes. Nines. He wasn't just a traitor to the First Orderâ€|he

was a betrayer of his word. He had left them abandoned and broken. Was that really all he was good for?

And Poe wrapped his arms around Finn's frame. Poe felt the man's heart beat. Felt his breath fill his lungs, slow and stained. "Finn, do you remember what I said when you first showed up on base with BB-8?" Poe asked. "Do you?"

Finn nodded.

Without letting go, Poe continued. "What did I say? I want to hear those words."

Finn took a deep breath, "You said I was a good man."

"That's right. And I meant it. And you know why?" Poe asked. "It's because you are. You pulled me outta that cell. You came back for me Finn. You came back for BB-8. You came back for Rey. You came back for all of us. And kriff anyone who says any different."

"Poeâ€¦I-"

"And" Poe reached behind his back, and pulled out Finn's stuffed toy. "You came back for this guy." He placed the bear on Finn's bedside. "And you wanna know why you came back for us?" Poe's eyes were a soft brown that Finn wished he could hold onto. "Because that's who you are, and what you'll always do."

Finn took his bear in his hands, he had heard that teddy bears could ward off bad dreams, or maybe that was just something he wished he could believe. "Iâ€¦just don't know if I'm strong enough."

"Finn, you don't need me, or anyone else to prove that to you. You've got a great heart, and that's the reason why we're all still here." Poe gently squeezed Finn's shoulders, "You came back for us, buddy. For all of us."

It was a comforting thought. A simple reaffirmation. Too many promises to keep, and too many men lost. Don't leave me behindâ€¦|_

"â€¦I don't want to leave themâ€¦|"

"And you won't," Poe assured him, "Because that's not who you are Finn." Poe gently pushed Finn down into the med bay bed. "But keeping yourself up isn't going to do any one any good. We all know that. So please, for the sake of the people you've already returned for, and for the sake of the people who you'll come back for in this fightâ€¦rest. Please."

A man needs his rest.

"Butâ€¦I can't-"

"Yeah you can," Poe said, "And you will."

Finn was so tiredâ€¦but his dreamsâ€¦his memories would still be a part of him. "So, then how am I supposed to deal with it?" he asked. "It's not like I can just turn my empathy off."

"And you never should," Poe said, "But that doesn't mean you have to torture yourself over it either. Just rest. Sleep. Keep your bear close to your chestâ€|and think of all the people you've helped." Poe slipped the covers over Finn's chin. "I'll be right here with ya'." _Just restâ€|Finn. _

Finn tucked his bear close to his chest, and felt his tension ease. Bears were magic charms, right? Perhaps this bear had returned for a friend left behind. Perhaps his injury, a stomach slashed open, was a wound earned for his empathy. A promise to return for those who needed him. Soldiers who had yet to learn to embrace their own futures. Good men who risked their lives for friend and foe alike.

"I'mâ€|just so tired," Finn said.

"So then rest," Poe said. "Come back for as many people as you can, but don't leave yourself behind in the process."

_I'll come back for you. _

And Finn closed his eyes. He would dream of Slip once more, he knew that to be a certainty. He would dream of Nines' red hair, and Zeroes' scar. But he would not fear their faces. He would do all he could for them, and all the Troopers he had fought beside, and fought againstâ€|and thenâ€|he would do what he could for himself. And thenâ€|he could begin again.

Slipâ€| "I'll come back for youâ€|" Finn's voice was as soft as a child's hair.

And Poe smiled. "I know you will." He folded his arms, and watched as his friend, his own personal hero, drifted off to a well-deserved rest. "You always do."

End
file.